

## THE WILLIAM-ROCKHILL NELSON GALLERY OF ART

## AND ATKINS MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

N E W SF L A S H E S

June - August,

1 9 3 8

LOAN EXHIBITIONS: During the summer months, June first through August, the three loan galleries will be hung with sixty-two paintings by the American artist, Hubert Stowitts. This time we see Stowitts in a new role - as designer of costumes and stage sets for an opera-ballet of love in ancient China.

The designs are all for a Chinese fantasy entitled "Fay-Yen-Fah" with poems by Templeton Crocker and music by Joseph Redding. The opera itself is without definite period and Stowitts has chosen a time from China's past, roughly the fourth to the eighth century, when all the elaborate pageantry of court life was not unlike the middle ages of Europe. Stowitts has pursued a careful research among the all-too-rare art remains of the Six Dynasty (386-581) and early T'ang (A.D. 618-908) periods, choosing the costumes from these four hundred years which suited him best. With an eye to bizarre and dramatic effects, he has exaggerated some features, added others quite his own, and created a combination of fact and fantasy quite in keeping with the light imaginative spirit of the opera.

The greatest body of material that has furnished the inspiration for the present exhibition is that brought back from the Tun Huang grottoes on the borders of Chinese Turkestan by the Paul Pelliot Expedition. These grottoes are a series of Buddhist cave-temples hollowed out in the face of a cliff. The interior walls are covered with frescos ranging in date from the sixth century on through the T'ang period to almost modern times. There are literally hundreds of square feet of paintings from the 8th, 9th, and 10th centuries forming the most complete body of material which has survived of early Chinese painting. The Paul Pelliot photographs of these wall paintings have been published in six folios.

The most amazing and romantic episode connected with Tun Huang was the discovery there by Sir Aurel Stein, during his 1907 expedition, of a walled up chapel filled with paintings and manuscripts. Internal evidence of dated documents shows that the treasure was hidden away for safe keeping during some war or barbaric raid shortly after the close of the tenth century A.D. The paintings recovered in this remarkable way are now divided between the British Museum and the museum in Delhi.

In many of these T'ang dynasty paintings, both scrolls on silk and wall-paintings, the artists have added representations of the donors. Thus it was possible for Stowitts to study the costumes of Emperors and Viceroyes, court ladies and princes with their retinues over a period of several centuries. Then another important source for Stowitts has been a celebrated painting in the British Museum attributed to Ku K'ai-chih, a Chinese artist of the fourth century A.D. The elegant ladies of this scroll have furnished the basis of all the female costumes in the present exhibition. It is of great interest that the figures in the British Museum painting, and hence the Stowitts costumes, are strikingly similar to the splendid drawings on the unique stone coffin of the sixth century exhibited in our own Chinese gallery.

Aside from these paintings, Stowitts has drawn heavily upon the little clay figures of men and women which the Chinese were wont to bury with the dead. A visit to the Chinese gallery will show how much the artist has taken from the sixth and seventh century figurines of court ladies with their long sleeves, flowing robes, and elaborate high head-dresses.

Stowitts suggests, as a result of his research, that China was the source for most of the features of European dress during the Middle Ages - the long sleeves of the women, their trains and high, fantastic head-dress. He also finds in China the origin of the college graduates mortarboard and gown. This theory undoubtedly adds interest to the present designs, but parallels in fashion and style

are seldom accounted for in so simple a way as taking the earliest representations as the origins.

Visitors to the exhibition who remember the previous shows of Mr. Stowitts' work, "Vanishing India" and "Theatrical Arts of Java", will find, perhaps, that the artist's love of pattern and colour and his delight in decorative effect find their happiest expression in designs for the stage. Basing his work on careful research in fact, he is able to create a fantastic and imaginative world of pure romance.

CHINESE SHADOW-PLAY PUPPETS: A group of Chinese shadow-play puppets will be on display in the Little Museum from June 15th through the summer. The figures will be a selection from the comprehensive collection kindly lent to the Gallery by Captain Harry Starkey Aldrich of Manhattan, Kansas. Chinese shadow-play figures are designed to be shown in silhouette behind a translucent screen and so, aside from the outline, all features and inner markings are cut out. The best of such puppets are made of very thin stiffened leather. In figures of high quality, the designs are incredibly fine, cut with the utmost sureness and skill. The interest of the silhouette is heightened by the brilliant colours obtained by dyeing the leather. The faces of the puppets and their costumes are highly stylized and set by century old traditions. In beauty of drawing and originality of pattern the shadow-play figures represent a most important but too little known side of Chinese design. In technical execution and drawing the figures lent by Captain Aldrich are of the highest quality and may well date from the eighteenth century.

MASTERPIECE OF THE MONTH: A recent acquisition, a Graeco-Roman Portrait of a Lady from the cemetery of Fayûm, will be displayed in the Masterpiece room for the month of June. Dating from the 2nd century A.D., it will take its place as the earliest example of portraiture in the collection and illustrate an heretofore unrepresented technique - the antique method of painting in wax.

The Egyptians had from the earliest times represented on the mummy cases the face of the dead by a modeled mask. When in Roman times, the Graeco-Roman settlers took over the Egyptian manner of mummification, they at times employed a sculptured mask on the mummy, but more often the face of the dead person was shown by a vivid and realistic portrait generally painted on wood. This portrait panel was fastened above the actual face of the deceased and held in place by means of the heavy linen bandages which encased the mummy. The discovery of the existence of these portraits, late in the nineteenth century when excavations were made in the Graeco-Roman cemeteries about Cairo, added an important link in an historical survey of Western painting, as revealing almost all that has survived of the once flourishing Hellenistic school of portrait painting.

SUMMER OPENING HOURS: Beginning June 1st, the Wednesday evening openings will be discontinued for the summer. Otherwise Gallery hours will be as usual - ten to five on week days, two until six on Sundays, and Monday closed all day.

The warm days of June, July, and August should be an excellent time to make leisurely visits to the museum collections, for the galleries will be comfortably cool, due to the installation last year of the air conditioning system. The Gallery invites you to spend many pleasant and profitable hours within its walls.

FRIENDS OF ART: The study classes of the Friends of Art have been discontinued for the summer months. They will be resumed again in the fall and announcement of dates and subjects will be made in the September news letter.

STAFF ACTIVITIES: The Director, Mr. Paul Gardner, will spend the summer traveling in Egypt and the Mediterranean area. Miss Frances O'Donnell, who is in charge of junior educational activities will leave July 1st for three months travel in Europe.

Mr. James Roth of the Gallery staff has been awarded a Carnegie scholarship for study at the Harvard Summer School. He expects to concentrate on the techniques of painting and restoration, a field in which the fine research laboratories of Harvard and the Fogg Museum have been most active.

SUMMER ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN: Registration for the summer Gallery classes for children will begin June 7th. The first class will meet the following Tuesday, June 14th, to continue for six weeks, on every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday morning from ten until twelve o'clock. Enrollment will be limited to two hundred boys and girls over seven years of age, who are interested in learning more about the Gallery and its collections, and who enjoy drawing, modeling, or a variety of handicrafts.

The following classes will be offered this summer:

Drawing A - for children 12 years and older.

Drawing B - " " 10 to 12 years old.

Drawing C - " " 7 to 9 " "

Puppets - for children 10 years and over. In place of the usual marionette class, this summer two new types will be studied. First puppets and paper puppets, resembling the Chinese shadow puppets. Members of the class will make the puppets and enact the parts in the plays.

Gallery Games - for children 7 to 9 years of age who have not attended a gallery class before. Simple crafts, stories, games, and dramatizations are planned to direct the child's interest to many sections of the Gallery so that at the end of the term he has at least a nodding acquaintance with the outstanding objects in the collection.

General Crafts - for children 9 to 12 years of age. More advanced crafts than Gallery Games, chosen to correlate the more specialized study of certain sections of the Gallery.

Clay Modeling - for children over ten years of age.

The registration fee for the full course is \$1.00. An additional charge of .35 will be made in certain classes for materials furnished by the Gallery.

Game Trays: Two game trays are placed in Kirkwood Hall every Saturday morning at ten o'clock and a wide selection of games is available to any young visitor at any time between ten and four-thirty o'clock. No enrollment or registration is necessary.

William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art  
Kansas City, Missouri

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